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MMA: Misunderstanding My Art

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MMA: MISUNDERSTANDING MY ART

by

Erica Y. Mills

B.S., Bowie State University, 2008

A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree

Department of Mass Communication and Media Arts
in the Graduate School
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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

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Approved by:

Jan Thompson, Chair

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF
ERICA MILLS, for the Master of Science degree in MASS
COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA ARTS, presented on NOVEMBER 3,
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TITLE: MMA: MISUNDERSTANDING MY ART

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Jan Thompson

“MMA: Misunderstanding My Art,” explores the sport of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) and the lives of four fighters who participate in the sport. MMA, one of the fastest growing sports in the world, continues to be ill-perceived and misunderstood because of the nature of the sport. MMA is a full contact sport in which opponents employ trained techniques in combating each other to win a competition. Fighters suffer injuries, but serious injury in the sport is not common. Like other contact sports, there are rules, regulations and safety tactics that are employed during matches, yet critics consider the sport “too dangerous,” and it has been labeled “human cockfighting”. “MMA: Misunderstanding My Art” further explores reasons negative views of the sport exist, and how such an aggressive sport has the power to change lives.

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CHAPTER ONE

MIXED MARTIAL WHAT?

Can a boxer beat a wrestler? Can a tae kwon do artist beat a karate master? Only one sport can truly determine the answer to those questions: Mixed Martial Arts (MMA). Mixed Martial Arts, also known as “no holds bar fighting, is a combat sport that mixes techniques from different martial arts, Greco-Roman wrestling, boxing and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu” (Bocco, 2011, para 1). Unique to the world of sports, MMA allows fighters from various disciplines to compete against each other. The original goal of MMA was to determine which discipline was the best. Fighters usually begin with a background in one of the following martial arts: Boxing, Judo, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, Karate, Freestyle Wrestling, Greco-Roman Wrestling, Kickboxing, Tae Kwon Do, or Jiu-Jitsu. The first official MMA fight in the United States was held in Denver, Colorado in 1993. Since its debut, the popularity of MMA has increased and is now considered the fastest growing sport in the history of sports.

History

Mixed Martial Arts can be traced back to 648 B.C., with the introduction of the sport Pankration by the Greeks. Pankration, “a combination of two Greek words: pan, meaning “all” and Kratos, meaning “powers,” was a mixture of boxing and wrestling and originally had only two rules” (Walter, 2003, p. 1). Those rules were: no biting and no eye gouging. Additionally, Pankration battles ended when one fighter was

knocked out or forced into submission by raising his hand, signaling he wanted to quit. Common of those matches were hour-long bouts, which sometimes resulted in one or both competitors being killed, usually by strangulation. The fights took place in a square ring, “approximately 12 to 14 feet across, which Greeks hoped would encourage close-quarter combat” and the referee would be equipped with a rod or switch to strike the fighters when one or both of them broke rules of the match (Walter, 2003 p. 1). Techniques included punches, kicks, knee strikes, elbows and holds. Pankration is believed to be the beginning of Asian martial arts, but when the sport began to decline, boxing and wrestling became popular.

In 1925, in Brazil, mixed martial arts was revived by the Gracie Family and came to be known as vale tudo, meaning “anything goes” or “no rules.” When George Gracie immigrated to Brazil, he met and became close to a gentlemen by the name of Mitsuyo Maeda from Japan. Maeda was a champion of Judo, a Japanese martial art, and offered to teach Judo lessons to Carlos Gracie, George Gracie’s great-grandson. At the age of 15, Carlos began to train with Maeda until he was 21, and when Maeda decided to return to Japan, Carlos taught his four brothers the art that he’d learned from Maeda. The Gracie brothers took what they’d learned from Maeda, adapted some of the techniques to suit their style and in 1925, opened a jiu-jitsu academy. To bring more attention to the academy, Carlos developed the “Gracie Challenge.” Carlos placed

advertisements in several newspapers, which included his picture and stated “if you want a broken arm, or rib, contact Carlos Gracie at this number” (Walter, 2003 p. 2). The ad proved effective and began to attract challengers all throughout Brazil. As the public became increasingly interested in these matches, they had to be “held in Brazil’s larger soccer stadiums, and attracted record crowds” (Walter, 2003 p. 2). In one of the first professional fights, Helio Gracie, Carlos’s younger brother, won the fight in 30 seconds. News of the fights began to spread to Japan, and Japanese fighters began traveling to Brazil in an attempt to defeat the 135-pound Helio Gracie. Helio, often outweighed by his opponents by more than 100 pounds, continued to defeat his opponents, fighting more than 1,000 fights from 1935 to 1951. After his reign, Carlos and Helio’s sons continued the “Gracie Challenge.” Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu grew immensely and the Gracie’s eventually brought the sport to the United States. Rorion Gracie, son of Helio Gracie, met a salesman by the name of Art Davie. Davie had connections in the television industry and initiated a meeting with Bob Meyrowitz, president of Semaphore Entertainment Group (SEG), a company that hosted live pay-per-view sporting events. As a result of the meeting, the three established what is known today as the biggest MMA organization, the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), holding its first event in 1993.

Modern MMA

After its debut in 1993, MMA became an instant hit among fans and

spectators of the sport, but it continued to raise issues and concerns about its safety. Donald Walter Jr. (2003), author of “Mixed Martial Arts: Ultimate Sport, or Ultimately Illegal” states,

The first six UFC fights had very few rules . . . there were no weight classes, no time limits or rounds, and no mandatory safety equipment. The only rules were the fighters could not eye gouge, bite or fishhook and fights could only end with a referee’s stoppage, knockout or submission. (p. 2)

Because of the lack of time limits, fights went on for long periods of time and some exceeded the pay-per-view allotted time. As a result, in 1995, the UFC introduced a 30-minute time limit, but there were still no judges. In gaining popularity, the UFC in particular became increasingly popular among politicians as well. Senator John McCain of Arizona campaigned against the UFC and as a result, in 1997 pay-per-view carriers dropped the sport from its services and several states banned MMA. Later, in 2001, three fans, brothers Frank and Lorenzo Ferititta and boxing manager Dana White, banded together to form Zuffa, LLC., and bought the Ultimate Fighting Championship Franchise.

Zuffa’s number one goal was cooperation with and operation under the guidelines of the State Athletic Commission to establish UFC as a legitimate and sanctioned sport that could find its way into the mainstream sports scene. (Wood, n.d. p. 4)

CHAPTER TWO RULES AND REGULATIONS

In May of 2001, the New Jersey State Athletic Control Board drafted and adopted rules known as the Unified Rules of Mixed Martial Arts, under which the sport is now conducted. MMA has been labeled “human cockfighting” and “barbaric,” but its reemergence bought a new set of rules and regulations for the sport and safety of its fighters. The new rules included: five weight classes, time limits and rounds, scoring guidelines, mandatory judges, substance testing and a list of over 31 ways to foul.

Weight Classes

There are nine weight classes in the sport of MMA. They are as follows:

Flyweight: up to 125 lbs (57 kg)
Bantamweight: 126 lbs – 135 lbs (61 kg)
Featherweight: 136 lbs – 145 lbs (66 kg)
Lightweight: 146 lbs – 155 lbs (70 kg)
Welterweight: 156 lbs – 170 lbs (77kg)
Middleweight: 171 lbs – 185 lbs (84 kg)
Light Heavyweight: 186 lbs – 205 lbs (93 kg)
Heavyweight: 206 lbs – 265 lbs (120 kg)
Super Heavyweight: 265 lbs and up

Table 1: MMA Weight Class Scale

It is important to note that weight classes are dependent upon the MMA organization; therefore, all weight classes do not have to be instituted at each fight event.

Rounds, Time Limits and Scoring

On an amateur level, fighters compete for 3 five-minute rounds, with a championship match operating for 5 five-minute rounds. Fights are scored by a panel of three judges, chosen by the organization promoting the fight, on a 10-point system. The winner of the fight receives 10 points, while the loser is scored with nine points or less.

“Matches are scored not only for striking attacks, but for ground fighting effectiveness, submissions and takedowns” (Wood, n.d. p. 1).

Additionally, there are several ways in which a fight can be ended or won by a competitor:

1. Knockout (KO): Occurs due to strikes when a fighter becomes unconscious, by which his opponent is declared the winner.
2. Technical Knockout (TKO): Is declared when the referee stops a fight if a fighter cannot “intelligently defend himself,” the fighter becomes unconscious or the fighter has a serious injury, such as a broken bone. (Wikipedia, 2011 p. 9)
3. Doctor Stoppage: Occurs when the referee stops a match due to an injury and the ring side doctor comes in and examines the fighter to determine if he is able to continue fighting.
4. Corner Stoppage: Occurs when a fighter’s corner men stop a fight between rounds or signal by throwing a towel in the cage. This is done on behalf of the fighter.
5. Submission: When a fighter signals he has been defeated by tapping on the floor of the cage or the opponent’s body. A fighter can also submit verbally.
6. Decision: When a match does all three rounds, or five rounds in a championship match, the panel of three judges determine the outcome of the fight.
7. Forfeit: A fighter forfeits when he or his representative decides not to fight before a match.

8. Disqualification: Fighters receive “warnings” from the referee when they commit a foul or illegal fighting move. If a fighter receives three warnings, he is automatically disqualified. Additionally, if a fighter deliberately injures his opponent illegally, he is automatically disqualified.
9. No Contest: A match is declared no contest when both opponents are in violation of the rules or an injury occurs from “an accidental illegal technique.” (Wikipedia, 2011 p. 9)

Rules

All MMA rules can be found under the Unified Rules for Mixed Martial Arts, established by the New Jersey State Athletic Control Board in 2000. The rules establish cage dimensions, permissions and restrictions, requirements for mouthpieces, protective equipment, gloves and more. Frank Shamrock and Mary Van Note, (2009) authors of “*Mixed Martial Arts for Dummies*,” compiled a list of prohibitions during fights.

- No groin attacks.
- No knees to the head on a grounded opponent.
- No strikes to the back of the head or spine.
- No head butts.
- No eye gouging.
- No fish hooking.
- No fingers in an opponent’s orifices.
- No biting.
- No hair pulling.
- No strikes or grabbing of the throat.
- No manipulation of the fingers or toes.
- No intentional grabbing of the ring or cage.
- No intentional throwing of your opponent outside the ring or cage

Table 2: From *Mixed Martial Arts for Dummies* (2009, p. 2).

Additionally, fighters are required to complete mandatory steroid and recreational drug testing, MRI/MRA exams and mandatory blood screenings.

Judging and Safety

Each MMA fight event is required to have a panel of three judges. Each fight event must also have a ringside doctor and ambulance on site in case of an emergency. In addition to the many prohibitions of the sport and ways to stop a fight, MMA fighters are examined closely before, during and after each fight event by the organizations appointed doctor. In an interview with Dr. Douglas Brown, ringside physician for 618 MMA, he explains his role:

As ringside physician, my job is to be here prior to the fights to do their pre-fight physicals, to make sure they are in physical shape to get in the octagon and to compete in the sport. After that, then my job is to be here during the event to follow the fighters in the fight to make sure that they're protected at all costs . . . I'm just their second set of eyes to see if they have a medical problem that requires me to stop the fight, otherwise it's left up to the referee (D. Brown, personal communication, April, 2011).

CHAPTER THREE TRAINING

Participants of MMA go through an extremely intense training process that demands long hours of mastering techniques, and time and attention to detail. Many people believe that MMA is just “fighting,” when contrarily, “it may take years for somebody to learn the several MMA techniques and how to utilize it for fighting” (West, 2009 p. 1). The ultimate goal of many MMA fighters is to become a professional fighter, therefore, training is dependent upon the individual and how good he or she wants to become. In an interview with pro fighter Garrett Gross, he states:

The training is pretty tough . . . we do a lot of circuits Monday through Friday, conditioning, technique, striking, groundwork and sparring. As a fighter, I spend quite a bit of time in the gym, but there are other things that make a fighter besides being in the gym. It’s not just coming into the gym and punching a bag . . . It depends on how good you want to be. I read about the sport and study the sport . . . all different kinds of styles. A lot of guys are only good in one area but if you want to be a champion, you have to learn them all (G. Gross, personal communication, March 28, 2011).

Similarly, amateur fighter William Meneese states:

The training is very intense. It’s so intense that it makes you puke and you just have to keep on going. We lift weights, sprint, and then we have to pick up a 100-pound bag, slam it, punch it . . . and then flip a

tire, sprint again, so it wears you out quick (W. Meneese, personal communication, March 25, 2011).

On a basic level, training consists of activities such as push-ups, sit-ups, weight lifting, striking and kicking punching bags, striking mitts, bear crawling, pushing over 100-pound tires, tire banging with a sledge hammer, jumping rope, various types of kicks, boxing, wrestling with a partner, running, jogging, and other basic conditioning. Additionally, MMA encompasses several different disciplines that a fighter must be trained in to effectively compete as a mixed martial artist. Typically, fighters are trained in one of the following disciplines and eventually become trained in several areas: Karate, Boxing, Judo, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, Freestyle Wrestling, Kickboxing, Greco-Roman Wrestling, Tae Kwon Do, and Jiu-Jitsu. According to former militarian and trainer Sam Burns, unique to the sport of MMA are its ranges. In an interview he explains,

MMA is different from other sports because you have so many different ranges . . . You have the long distance, which is the kicking range, you have the slightly closer distance which is striking. You have the clinch range, which features wrestling, takedowns and mui thai strikes. You have stand-up, doing standing wrestling basically, and then you also have the ground work . . . the jiu-jitsu, the grappling and the submission wrestling . . . So it's very multi-faceted and to be good at it,

you have to do it all (S. Burns, personal communication, March 24, 2011).



Kicking Range Striking Range Clinch Range Stand-up Ground
Figure 1. MMA Ranges

MMA fighters also practice various strategies to employ during their fights. Sprawl-and-Brawl, popularly known as one of the strategies used by pro fighter Chuck Liddell, features a fighters attempt to stay on his feet while kicking and punching his opponent. If the fighters end up on the mat, “they will often tie each other up . . .until the referee brings them back to their feet” (MMA Wild, 2007 p. 1). Clinch fighting, commonly referred to as “dirty boxing” involves the fighters in a clinch hold, attempting to take his opponent down to the mat, while employing knees, punches, elbows and stomps to the body. In an article entitled “MMA Wild,” this strategy is characterized as “a brutal strategy, which can leave opponents bloody and battered” (MMA Wild, 2007 p. 1). In Ground-and-Pound, opponents attempt to take one another down to the mat, get on top in the dominant position, sitting on his opponent’s stomach, and punching him until he is knocked out or submits. Fighters skilled in takedowns often use this strategy to prepare for a submission hold. In submission grappling, fighters attempt to take their

opponent down to the mat, obtain the dominant position and put the opponent in a submission hold.

CHAPTER FOUR

YOU JUST DON'T GET IT

The journey that the sport of MMA has taken to emerge as an official sport has been controversial. This is illustrated in the rise and fall of the sport in 1997 that led to MMA events being dropped from pay per-view services and banned in several states. Leading the campaign that led to the demise of mixed martial arts on television was Arizona Senator John McCain. Senator McCain labels the sport “human cockfighting,” expressing the idea that the sport is “too brutal” and “to hit a man when he is down is un-American” (Walter, 2003 p. 2). One of the major reasons MMA fighting connotes danger and brutality is because it is perceived that the objective of the sport is to inflict pain on or injure your opponent. Fighters, spectators and proponents of the sport strongly disagree. After interviewing more than 15 mixed martial arts fighters and trainers, the consistent term used to describe the sport and justify their participation in the sport is “competition.” MMA fighters do not enter the cage with the intention of harming their opponent; they enter the cage to win a competition. In an interview with former fighter and MMA trainer Nathan Marks, he states,

I think MMA is all about competition, and honestly I think it's a personal competition. MMA is one person, yes you have a team but you're one person in the gym. MMA promotes self-reliance, it's all you and you're in control (N. Marks, personal communication, March 29, 2011).

The fighters I interviewed also emphasized respect as being a principle factor of what MMA is all about. Jerry Burnett explains, “MMA is all about competition and respect. That’s why whenever you see a fight in MMA, after they’re done, no matter what, they’re always shaking hands and hugging . . . it’s about respect” (J. Burnett, personal communication, April 5, 2011). MMA has also been compared to street fighting. Having participated in both types of fighting, pro fighter Garret Gross explains,

MMA fighting is different from street fighting in a lot of ways. I found that out when I went to spar with a guy . . . I had been in plenty of street fights and I thought I would go over there and spar with this guy and beat the crap out of him, using stuff that I knew from the streets and that’s not what happened. There’s a lot more technique and thinking [in MMA]. When you’re street fighting, you’re just going, and you’re not thinking . . . you’re just doing whatever. But [MMA] it’s a whole different type of game (G. Gross, personal communication, March 28, 2011).

Amateur fighter Brandon Taylor agrees saying,

They’re different because of the mental aspect . . . [with street fighting] there’s no waiting three months and knowing you’re gonna have to fight on a specific night, in front of thousands of people, you have to train, you know that the other guy is training specifically to beat you (B. Taylor, personal communication, March 24, 2011).

Like any other contact sport, MMA fighters take the risk of being injured, but that is not the sole purpose of the sport. As mentioned previously, the rules and regulations of MMA make the sport relatively safe. In his article entitled “Mixed Martial Arts: Ultimate Sport, or Ultimately Illegal?” Donald F. Walter, Jr. (2003) writes,

The numerous ways in which a fight can end in a mixed martial arts event, the great deal of safety precautions taken by promoters, and the attentiveness of mixed martial arts referees, who can end a fight at any time they see fit are all reasons why there have been no serious injuries in the recorded history of sanctioned mixed martial arts events (p. 3).

In addition to the ill-perceived notion that MMA is a dangerous, barbaric sport, ironically, a sport in which two opponents physically combat one another for a position of dominance and superiority has changed the lives of several MMA fighters in significant ways. Amateur fighter William Meneese explains, “On personal level, MMA has changed my life by making me a better person . . . controlling my temper, I watch what I’m doing and I don’t get angry as much” (W. Meneese, personal communication, March 25, 2011). Amateur fighter Jerry Burnett says, “MMA has changed my life . . . it’s made me a better person, I’m a better fighter . . . I’m a better father. I’m a lot more disciplined in a lot of aspects and a lot of people won’t see that, but I see it” (J. Burnett, personal communication, April 5, 2011).

It seems as though the lives of MMA fighters are not only changed as a result of the sport, but also as a result of their trainers and mentors in the sport. In explaining his job as a MMA trainer, Sam Burns of Arsenal Martial Arts in Carbondale, Illinois says,

My job as a trainer, I could probably surmise it by saying everything. I have to make sure they're in the gym. I have to make sure they're doing the right things outside the gym. I have to make sure the holes in their game are patched up. I have to make sure they're ready . . . because in the amateur realm, we're not getting paid to do this, this is all will power. So I have to keep them motivated and focused, which is sometimes the hardest part (S. Burns, personal communication, March 24, 2011).

Fans and participants of the sport represent different races and classes of people. "They are teachers, police officers, attorneys, truck drivers, accountants, laborers, ministers, soldiers, doctors, students and family members" (Walter, 2003 p. 4). Amateur MMA fighter Brandon Taylor is a college graduate with a degree in Marketing and is a junior accountant for EMAC Incorporated, an equipment and monitoring control company. According to Julie Wood (n.d.), author of "MMA Facts," "UFC, the biggest MMA organization, boasts that a significant majority of their fighters have college degrees" (p. 5). Therefore, how could a sport with participants and fans represented in all different walks of life have such a negative connotation and be deemed "un-American?" MMA

fighters are not human cockfighters, barbarians, street fighters or savages, they are everyday people who “enjoy a sport that is misunderstood, and as a result,” down-talked, hated and misconceptualized (Walter, 2003 p. 5).

MMA is one of the fastest growing sports in the U.S. and continues to gain the attention of the public. UFC events have been featured in USA Today, and fight events have been aired on ESPN, FOX Sports Network and Spike TV. In her article entitled “MMA Facts,” Julie Wood (n.d.) provides a table illustrating television shows and magazines that have featured mixed martial arts.

Television Shows featuring MMA:

60 Minutes	The Sopranos
The Tonight Show with Jay Leno	ESPN Cold Pizza
NBC Sports	Scarborough Country
Jimmy Kimmel Live	Outside the Lines
The O'Reilly Factor	Dr. Phil
Extra	MAD TV
Late Night with Conan O'Brien	Entertainment Tonight
Fox & Friends	The Craig Kilborn Show
Entourage	Inside Edition
Best Damn Sports Show Period	Business Nation
Access Hollywood	

Magazine Features about the sport and its athletes:

Time	GQ
Maxim	Men's Journal
Advertising Age	People
Forbes	Shock! Magazine
Business Week	STAR
Entertainment Weekly	Muscle and Fitness
FHM	Men's Fitness
Variety	Flex Magazine
US Weekly	Stuff Magazine
ESPN Magazine	Sports Illustrate

Table 3: From MMA Facts (n.d. p. 6)

CHAPTER FIVE

I'M AN ARTIST . . . NOT JUST A FIGHTER!

In my documentary entitled, “MMA: Misunderstanding My Art,” I focus on a group of four fighters from Southern Illinois. Each fighter has a unique and interesting background on how they began their careers as MMA fighters, the obstacles and challenges they face as a result of being a fighter, and how the art of the sport has changed their lives. The MMA fighters featured in my documentary are: Brandon Taylor, Garrett Gross, William Meneese and Jerry Burnett. In this documentary, you will see a fighter overcome a troubled and haunting past to emerge as a pro fighter. You will witness a fighter struggle with depression as a result of losing a loved one, using MMA as his release. You will also see fighters beat all odds against a heart condition, foster care, doubt, revenge and rivalry in *MMA: Misunderstanding My Art* by Erica Mills.

A MMA match is not just simply a fight. Unique to the sport are specific techniques and the art of executing a move. In an interview and MMA demonstration with amateur fighter Ron Davis, he explains several moves that one can employ when their opponent is on the ground.

There's ground game . . . there's a bunch of different types of holds. You have what's called side control, where you have them under your side. You have full guard where his legs will be wrapped around you and you'll basically be on his chest and then you'll have full mount, which is basically you're straddling him and his legs are underneath you. Any fighter will tell you that this is the best position because there's no

defense from it . . . Once you get full control, full mount as they call it, it's straight to the face [punches], landing on the side of the head, hit him in the nose . . . (R. Davis, personal communication, March 3, 2011).

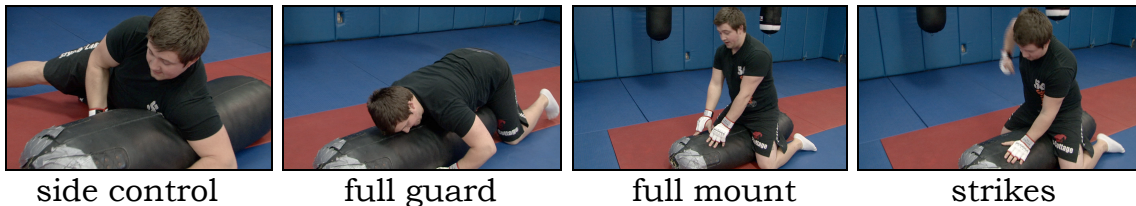
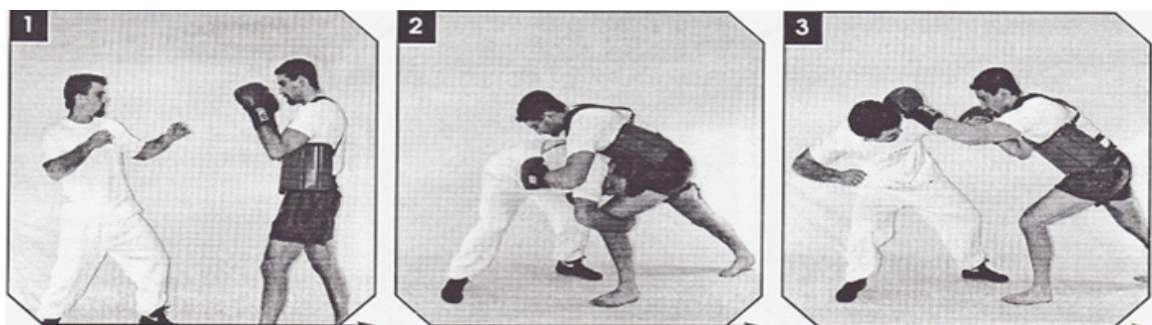


Figure 2. Ron Davis Ground Game Demonstration

Featured on mixedmartialarts.com is a notebook containing tips, tricks and techniques employed by actual fighters during bouts. In an explanation on the technique of closing distance, decreasing the amount of space between opponents, it is important to note, “The knowledge of how to close is useless without training. With a great deal of training it is one of the most important, effective aspects of your game” (Jenness, n.d. p. 2). Below are photos and excerpts on closing from the fighter’s notebook.



Advanced closing drills require a training partner wearing Punch/Spar Mitts and a chest protector

You try to close on your partner, he sprawls or throws punches at you

You instantly back out

Figure 3. Training Close To Distance Example

CHAPTER SIX THE WORTH

In every fighter and trainer interview that I conducted, I asked, “is MMA fighting worth the risk?” Each fighter and trainer replied, “yes,” all except one. Police officer and martial arts trainer Andrew Sabens says, “To me, no, just because I have a job, but guys that want to do it, I’m more than willing to help them out” (A. Sabens, personal communication, March 24, 2011). Contrarily, every other fighter and trainer said that MMA fighting is worth the risk. Why? The underlying consensus to this question was that MMA fighting is no more dangerous than any other daily activity that everyday people participate in. For example, amateur MMA fighter Brandon Taylor strongly asserts that MMA is no more dangerous than driving a car:

For me, it is . . . [worth the risk] I don’t want to get hurt. I don’t want to have anything bad happen to me, it’s part of the game though. When you drive to work, you could die, when you fly in a plane, you could die, so there are risks everywhere. Do you think about that every single time you’re doing something . . . no you don’t. If you did, you wouldn’t leave your house. So there’s risk, but it’s up to the fighter to think about that all the time or actually just let go and say you know what, I’m just going to try my best and make the best out of it (B. Taylor, personal communication, March 24, 2011).

In the history of the sanctioned MMA events, there have been no serious, life-threatening injuries and no deaths. In 2002, a five-year

MMA injuries report was conducted from 2002 – 2007. Injuries from 635 MMA matches were documented and the results were as follows:

. . . 300 of the 1,270 athletes sustained documented injuries with an injury rate of 26.3 per 100 fight participations. Most common reported injuries were lacerations and upper extremity injuries. Severe concussion rate was 15.4 per 1,000 athlete exposures, or 3% of all matches. No deaths or critical sports-related injuries resulted from any of the regulated matches during the study period (MMA Mania, n.d. p. 1).

In July of 2006, published by Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine was an “Incidence of Injury in Professional Mixed Martial Arts Competitions” for the state of Nevada. All MMA events taking place between September 2001 and December 2004 were analyzed. Authors Gregory H. Bledsoe, Edbert B. Hsu, Jurek George Grabowsik, Justin D. Brill & Guohua Li (2006) concluded,

Of 121 MMA matches involving 220 different fighters . . . there were a total of 96 injuries to 78 fighters. Of the 171 matches fought, 69 (40.3%) ended with at least one injured fighter. The overall injury rate was 28.6 injuries per 100 fight participations or 12.5 injuries per 100 competitor rounds (p. 1).

Additionally, they concluded:

Facial lacerations was the most common injury accounting for 47.9% of all injuries, followed by hand injury (13.5%), nose injury (10.4%) and eye injury (8.3%) . . . The most common conclusion to an

MMA fight was a technical knockout (TKO) followed by tap out” (Bledsoe, et al, 2006 p. 1).

The results of each study show that the serious injury rate of this sport is significantly low. Compared to that of boxing, which has documented over 1,000 deaths as a result of the sport, MMA has seen two deaths, both of which occurred outside of the cage, in its sanctioned history.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Mixed Martial Arts is and continues to be one of the most controversial sports in the United States of America, yet it is one of the fastest growing sports in the U.S. as well. Beginning as a mixture of boxing and wrestling, MMA has evolved into a full combat sport where participants employ a wide variety of techniques and skills to defeat an opponent. Combining the arts of many traditional styles of fighting such as boxing, wrestling, and karate, some critics deemed the sport dangerous, barbaric and un-American. Mixed martial arts is many times perceived as an opportunity for two opponents to enter a cage with the intention of physically harming or injuring his opponent. This is the perception of critics and non-participants of the sport. MMA is often misunderstood because of the lack of knowledge regarding the sport. Those who do not study or participate in MMA do not realize the work, effort, dedication, training and studying that goes into being a mixed martial artist. Some fighters train for years before they are ready for their first MMA match.

MMA also changes lives. Some participants of the sport not only claim to become better athletes and live healthier lifestyles, they become more disciplined, more focused and learn to handle obstacles in their lives differently. Due to the numerous safety precautions and measures taken by MMA organizations, MMA fighters believe that such a combative and aggressive sport is well worth the risk. Proponents of the sport

argue that MMA is safer than comparable sports such as boxing, which has seen more than 1,000 deaths in its history. MMA has documented two in the history of the sport. Mixed martial artists are some of the most skilled and talented athletes in the world, and the fan base of the sport continues to expand tremendously. MMA possess great potential to be a highly successful sport, but in order for that to happen, more and more members of society must first become educated about the sport. Until that happens, the concept and objective of mixed martial arts will continue to be misconceptualized by misguided opinions, remaining a misunderstood art.

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